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Statement by Governor Haley Barbour
Announcing the Signing of Higher Education Appropriations Bills

I am honored so many leaders of the higher education community are here with us on the day I sign the appropriations bills to fund our institutions of higher learning and community colleges in Fiscal Year 2007.

Education is the number one economic development issue in Mississippi and the number one quality of life issue. Therefore, it is and must be the top priority of state government. I am committed to Mississippi embracing lifelong learning. Education begins in the early childhood, continues from kindergarten through 12th grade, through higher education at a community college and/or a university and beyond to workforce training and adult education.

In the legislative sessions since I have been Governor, state funding for K-12 school districts through the Mississippi Adequate Education Program has increased \$323 million, or 19%. In addition to this funding increase, we have kept the promise of two consecutive 8% increases in teacher pay.

Spending on our K-12 public schools is important, and I will continue to support increasing funding for our K-12 public schools.

But since Fiscal Year 2000, higher education in Mississippi has not fared as well as K-12.

During the previous Administration, funding for our universities was cut \$45 million, or 7%, while their number of students increased.

During the previous Administration, funding for our community colleges was cut \$32 million, or 16%, while their number of students increased.

Since my campaign for Governor in 2003, it has been my goal to substantially increase funding for higher education and to establish stable funding for our community colleges and universities. The last two years, we have essentially level funded universities and community colleges while giving a substantial increase in funding for workforce development programs at the community colleges.

This coming year, as a part of a real, honest balanced budget, we will have restored the cuts made during the previous Administration and will provide more funding for higher education than in any year in our state's history.

Support for our universities will increase \$90.5 million, a 15% increase. Included in this increase is a substantial increase of \$38.5 million, or 26%, for our University Medical Center, which is a jewel for the entire state.

Our community colleges will receive an increase of \$21.4 million, a 12% increase. Including the funding from the workforce enhancement fund which the Legislature approved when we overhauled our job training programs, the community colleges will receive more than \$36 million in state support for workforce development and job training. This almost twice as much as the community colleges have ever received for job training.

Higher education needed and deserved extra help this year, and higher education benefited from widespread support in the Legislature this year. But I want to especially thank Senator Jack Gordon, the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, who was a tireless advocate for increasing funding for higher education this year. Senator Gordon worked with another advocate for higher education, Chairman Johnny Stringer of the House Appropriations Committee, and Education Committee Chairmen Mike Chaney and Cecil Brown, to craft a responsible budget for higher education in the coming fiscal year.

I look forward to working with the Legislature to continue to improve all levels of education, including higher education.